DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 418 287 CE 076 220

TITLE	Non-completion of GNVQs. Improving Achievement.
INSTITUTION	Further Education Development Agency, London (England).
SPONS AGENCY	Department for Education and Employment, London (England).
ISBN	ISBN-1-85538-470-4
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	9p.; Summary of key findings of a research project on General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs). For the handbook, "Improving GNVCQ Retention and Completion," see CE 076 182.
AVAILABLE FROM	Further Education Development Agency (FEDA), Publications Dept., Coombe Lodge, Blagdon, Bristol BS40 7RG, United Kingdom (1 British pound).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Persistence; Change Strategies; Comparative Analysis; Delivery Systems; *Dropout Prevention; *Dropouts; Educational Policy; Foreign Countries; National Surveys; Postsecondary Education; Program Improvement; *Student Attitudes; *Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS	*General National Vocational Qualif (England); *United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

The reasons that students in the United Kingdom fail to complete General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) courses were examined through a study that involved four key elements: questionnaire survey of 3,391 students enrolled in GNVQ courses in further education colleges and schools; questionnaire survey of 782 centers providing GNVQs; follow-up interviews and focus groups with 38 of the students who had failed to complete GNVQ courses successfully; and 26 individual staff interviews and 1 group staff interview. Although most students were satisfied with their course and would recommend GNVQs to others, one-fourth of the students left their GNVQ course for work. The top reason cited for withdrawal was "the course was not right for me." The workload involved in completing portfolio evidence satisfactorily was a main reason for student noncompletion. Well-organized work experience placements had a positive impact on achievement rates, as did effective course teams and the systems they used. Simplification of the assessment involved in GNVQs was the top recommendation made by the learning centers surveyed. Other recommendations included the following: deliver key skills in relevant contexts; improve public perceptions of GNVQs and extend financial support to students who would otherwise be at risk of withdrawal. (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 418 287

D/EE
Department for Education and Employment

FEDA Further Education Development Agency

Non-completion of GNVQs

Improving achievement

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Most students were satisfied with their course and would recommend GNVQs to others.

The top reason for withdrawal was that 'the course was not right' for them.

Simplification of the assessment involved in GNVQs was the top recommendation made by centres.

One-quarter left their GNVQ course to take up work.

Centres can, through their own actions, make a substantial impact on levels of retention and achievement. Steps they have taken to reduce non-completion rates include . . .

This leaflet summarises the key findings of a research project on General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) carried out by FEDA in 1997 to examine the pattern of drop-out, retention and achievement, to identify what caused these. Comparing the profiles of successful students with those who failed to complete the course or gain the award gives the true reasons for non-completion. The findings of this research, carried out for the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), offer key messages to those designing and delivering GNVQs.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
S. Bosson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

. . . improving screening and induction . . .

Research methods	page 2
Key findings	page 3
Present situation and implications	page 4
Policy level recommendations	page 7

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CE 076 220

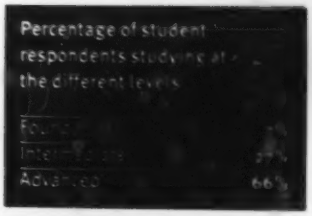
Research methods

The research involved four key elements:

- **A questionnaire survey of students enrolled on GNVQ courses**, more than 80% of which were studying in FE sector colleges, with the remainder in schools.
- **A questionnaire survey of 782 centres providing GNVQs**, 81% of which were schools, 13% were FE or tertiary colleges and 6% were sixth-form colleges.
- **Follow-up interviews and focus groups with 38 of the students** concentrating on those who had dropped out of courses before completion, or who had completed unsuccessfully.
- **A total of 26 individual interviews and one group interview of staff** with institution-wide GNVQ co-ordinating responsibilities, between them providing courses in 11 programme areas across all levels.

Profile of students involved

The large majority of respondents were from the 'big four' programme areas, with just under a quarter each from Business and Health & Social Care, 19% from Leisure & Tourism, and 11% from Art & Design.



Key findings

- **Student reactions to GNVQs are generally positive** – clear majorities expressed overall satisfaction and said that they would recommend GNVQs to others.
- **Retention and achievement is linked to prior GCSE attainment.** However, rates of drop-out and unsuccessful completion on GNVQ courses vary considerably within and between centres, in ways that cannot be explained by differences in student intake.
- **A significant minority of students were dissatisfied with their experience of GNVQs. This dissatisfaction is strongly related to drop-out and unsuccessful completion.** For most of these students, the course did not meet their expectations. Feelings that they had chosen the wrong course, that it lacked interest, and that the quality of teaching was unsatisfactory were their main reasons for withdrawal.
- **The workload involved in completing portfolio evidence satisfactorily was a main reason for student drop-out and non-completion.** The amount and timing of assignments was the top reason for dissatisfaction cited by students (44%) and the top area where they wanted to see improvements (41%). The top recommendation by centres for improving GNVQs was to simplify assessment (30%).
- **A total of 25% of non-completers left their GNVQ course to take up work.** For students, getting a job was the third most commonly quoted reason for non-completion.
- **The personal circumstances of students have some influence on non-completion rates, but have less of an impact than the other factors.** One-fifth of non-completing students said changes in personal and family circumstances were a main reason for withdrawal. Another 16% cited financial problems, and 10% health problems.
- **The financial pressures on centres to recruit students sometimes conflict with ensuring students are on the most appropriate course for their needs.** Although there was no evidence of systematic dilution of entry requirements, almost all staff were aware of the pressures to recruit. Students were sometimes offered other programme areas when their first choice was not available rather than being directed towards another provider.
- **Well-organised work experience placements have a positive impact on achievement rates.** Students left to take up jobs offered as a result of their placement in only a small minority of cases.
- **Studying for other qualifications at the same time as GNVQs does not appear to reduce achievement rates overall, and is a positive factor for many students.** However, staff acknowledged that a minority of students shed their studies for additional qualifications to cope with the GNVQ workload.
- **Effective course teams, and the systems they use, have a more obvious impact on completion rates than the structure of the timetable, the number of taught hours or the size of classes.** The confidence, motivation and effectiveness of course teams appeared to have much more impact on retention and achievement than the structure of the course.
- **Improvements to the design and delivery of GNVQs can make a significant positive impact on achievement rates.** Action taken by providing centres can make a significant positive impact on rates of successful completion.

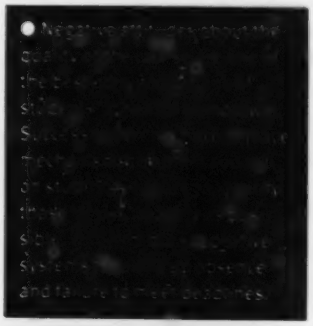
Present situation and implications

Better retention rates are associated with several factors relating to the effectiveness of course delivery. Key factors are given in the boxes that follow. The implications are described more fully in *Improving GNVQ retention and completion* (see back cover).

Dissatisfaction

Feelings that students had chosen the wrong course, that it lacked interest, that the quality of teaching was unsatisfactory and that it lacked relevance to the world of work were all closely linked to non-completion. Concerns about the help available to progress to higher level qualifications were also cited.

The table below gives the full list of reasons for withdrawing.



Students' main reasons for withdrawal	Foundation %	Intermediate %	Advanced %	Overall %
The course was not the right one for me	34	28	36	33
The course was boring	27	26	32	29
I got a job	27	26	25	26
I was dissatisfied with the quality of teaching	5	21	26	22
My personal/family circumstances changed	15	22	17	19
I did not get enough help from teaching staff	10	17	19	17
I had financial problems	10	17	14	16
There were too many assessments	15	11	16	14
I could not complete my portfolio evidence	10	11	13	12
I found it difficult to settle in	12	12	10	11
I had health problems	7	10	9	10
There were too many classroom lessons	7	9	9	9
I felt I didn't fit in with the other students	15	10	6	9
I transferred to a different type of course	2	7	11	8
I only wanted to take some units	5	5	8	7
The course was too difficult	15	6	7	7
I failed some of the tests	5	4	4	4
I was not allowed to take the course I wanted	5	3	3	3
I got a job with an employer with whom I had a work experience placement		1	3	2
I wanted to take a break before returning to complete more units	2	1	1	1

Recruitment

Virtually all staff were aware of the pressures to recruit. Alternative programme areas were sometimes offered to students whose first choice was not available, rather than directing them towards the nearest alternative centre. However, there was no evidence of systematic dilution of entry requirements.

Current funding mechanisms do not encourage admissions staff to give impartial advice on suitable courses at other providing centres since the costs associated with providing such guidance to students who enrol elsewhere are not covered.

Personal circumstances

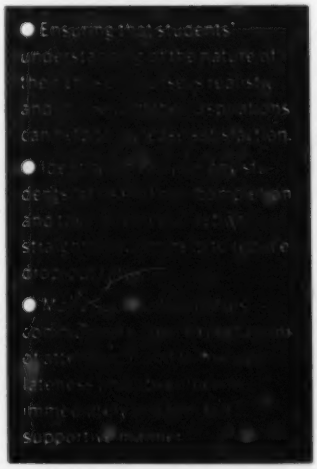
Students are more likely to withdraw where personal factors operate in conjunction with programme-related factors. Study difficulties may be reinforced by the conflicting demands of part-time work.

Design and delivery

Course expectations

Students are far more likely to succeed on a course if their original expectations have been matched or exceeded. A significant minority of students found their course different to their expectations and felt that they had been given little specific information about the programme prior to enrolment. There is often a peak in withdrawal in the first term as some students develop doubts about their choice. Unpunctuality and absenteeism are often connected with dissatisfaction and demotivation.

Most students interviewed were happy with the content of the courses. However, several mentioned poor organisation of the course among their reasons for leaving.



Workload and planning

Student dissatisfaction with the number, timing and difficulty of assignments, the amount of work and the mix of practical and written work were all associated with lower rates of successful completion.

More staff than students considered ability level, motivation and difficulties with assessments to be major causes of non-completion. Many staff thought that an unreasonable amount of work was required of students.

Many teaching staff considered the workload required by Advanced GNVQs to be greater than that required on A-level programmes. Despite this, GNVQs tend to attract students with prior lower attainment and are sometimes perceived as a 'softer option'.

Strategies successful in alleviating the problems of student workload include good quality induction programmes, careful scheduling by course teams, providing fewer, better-designed assignments and implementing deadlines while also providing support arrangements such as regular 'catch up' blocks of time.

Delivery

Almost 25% of non-completing students gave dissatisfaction with quality of teaching as the reason for non-completion. This contrasted with 1% of providing centres which identified this as a main reason.

The main areas where the ratings of successful students differed most from those of non-completers related to their interest in the course and the support they received from teachers.

Key skills

While some student dissatisfaction was related to failure to see the vocational relevance of key skills where they were taught separately, no significant links were found between the types of formal structural arrangements for courses and relative completion rates.

improving course organisation, including work scheduling.

Policy level recommendations

Changing the structure of GNVQs

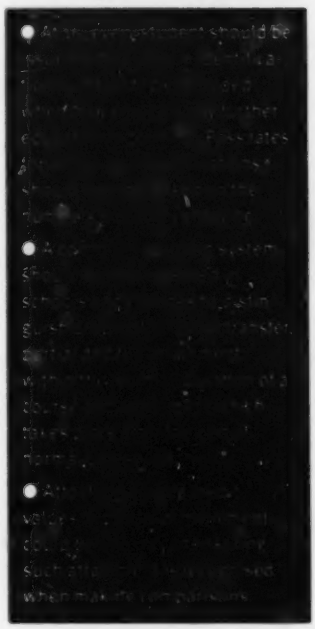
Policy-makers are currently piloting a new model for GNVQs. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) will evaluate the pilot of the GNVQ revised assessment model. The results of this will inform the final structure that is decided upon.

Improving public perceptions

Popular comment on GNVQ tends to focus on its supposed failings. This may undermine the confidence that potentially successful students and dedicated staff have in the qualification.

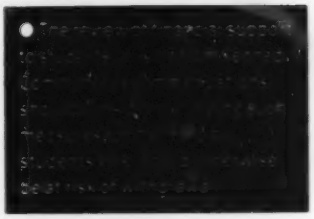
Information about pass rates

Concern about the seriousness of non- and unsuccessful completion rates on GNVQs is compounded by the lack of an adequate basis for comparison with those rates for equivalent alternative qualifications. Unlike GNVQs, pass rates for GCSEs and A-levels are calculated on the basis of students entered for the final examinations, rather than those originally enrolling. Partial achievement at GNVQ, for example, by a student who gains accreditation for six units (the equivalent of one A-level), is liable to be interpreted from the published statistics as a relative failure. By contrast, students gaining passes in one out of two or three A-levels undertaken contribute to the published pass rates.



Financial support for students

The personal circumstances of students have some influence on non-completion rates. Students are most likely to withdraw where personal factors operate in conjunction with programme-related factors. Study difficulties, in particular, may be reinforced by the conflicting demands of part-time work.



For copies of the full report of the research study, *Non-completion of GNVQs* (price £5.00), the handbook for tutors, *Improving GNVQ retention and completion* (price £7.50), or further copies of this pamphlet (price £1.00), please send an order to:

FEDA Publications Department
Coombe Lodge, Blagdon, Bristol BS40 7RG
Tel: 01761 462503 Fax: 01761 463140

ISBN 1 85538 470 4 Price £1.00

strategic research